

help to our seniors who need prescription drugs. Do not be fooled twice.

AMERICA'S WORKING

(Mr. PRICE of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PRICE of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, in spite of all of what the pessimists have said, and regardless of what the mainstream media reports, the economy has greatly improved.

The facts are plain and simple. Our Nation is producing more, and our government is spending less. The estimated Federal budget deficit is \$94 billion less than the earlier prediction, and we have had 14 consecutive quarters of economic growth.

House Republicans have faith in America's ability to grow our economy, and we look to the future with confidence. Our job in Congress is to hold the line on spending. And the unemployment rate has fallen to 5 percent, the lowest since September 2001, with nearly 4 million new jobs created in the last 2 years alone.

Sustained job growth, falling deficits, low interest rates and a booming housing market: America's economy is robust and getting stronger.

With fiscal responsibility and passing pro-growth bills, including the death tax repeal and legal reform, we continue to show our commitment to growing America's economy. But there is still work to do. I am hopeful that Congress will approve the highway and energy bills which will add new jobs to the economy, help improve our roadways, and decrease our dependence on foreign oil.

SOCIAL SECURITY AND WOMEN

(Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak about Social Security and the millions of American women who rely on it every day.

Women are among one of the largest groups of Social Security beneficiaries who stand to lose a great deal should Social Security be privatized. On average, women live 3 years longer than men. Any contributions to a private account would have to stretch out over more years.

Additionally, the private accounts do not have the guaranteed annual cost-of-living increase in Social Security which would jeopardize the retirement and economic security of older women through the gamble of the stock market.

Social Security is a good deal for women because it gives people with lower earnings a greater return on what they paid in, and women on average have lower incomes and less time in the workforce.

Mr. Speaker, it is high time we quit talking about privatizing Social Security

and instead come up with ways to strengthen it.

CENTRAL AMERICAN FREE TRADE AGREEMENT

(Mr. PORTER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Central American Free Trade Agreement. The Central American Free Trade Agreement. We use this acronym frequently, CAFTA. It is Central America, our brothers and sisters and the future of the world when it comes to the corridor for an economic base that is unlimited into South America and Central America.

Exports to Central America from my home State of Nevada grew 56 percent from 2000 to 2004, far higher than the 16 percent average increase. In 2003 alone, Nevada experienced an 88 percent increase with significant gains in machinery, computer and electronic manufacturing.

Manufactured goods accounted for 69 percent of Nevada's exports to Central America. Not only will the passage of CAFTA immediately eliminate tariffs on 80 percent of exports on Nevada's manufacturers; it will also abolish all remaining tariffs within 10 years, including the tariff on chemicals, electronic equipment, machinery, and transportation equipment.

Mr. Speaker, Central American Free Trade Agreement, the future economic base of the world is Central and South America.

DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON FREE SPEECH AND DISSENT

(Mr. NADLER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. NADLER. Mr. Speaker, I heard the remarks of the majority leader a few minutes ago. Democracy depends on free speech and dissent. Free speech is stifled when dissent is labeled treason or is derided in time of war as not supporting our troops.

We all support our troops. One can point out the mistakes or the dishonesty of the administration while not stinting in supporting our troops. Pointing out that the administration misled the country about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq is not "not supporting our troops."

Pointing out that Karl Rove appears to have participated in a conspiracy to punish Ambassador Wilson for telling the truth about this by revealing the Ambassador's wife's CIA role is not "not supporting our troops."

Pointing out the administration's justification for keeping our troops in harm's way in Iraq flip-flops by the season is not "not supporting our troops."

Demanding proper investigation of evidence that the administration has

disgraced this country by evading our laws against torturing prisoners is not "not supporting our troops."

A free society requires that all these accusations see the light of day. Let the administration rebut them if they can. But do not use the mantra of supporting our troops to stifle essential free speech.

STATE DEFENSE FORCES

(Mr. WILSON of South Carolina asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, as the global war on terrorism continues, State Defense Forces are playing an increasingly critical role in ensuring that their communities are prepared for Homeland Security crises and recovery from hurricane damage.

As a 31-year veteran of the South Carolina Army National Guard, I am well aware of the valuable contributions of the South Carolina State Guard. From training monthly to supporting National Guard operations, these capable men and women honorably offer their time and experience for their communities.

To ensure that these volunteers are used to their greatest potential, the gentleman from Tennessee (Mr. DAVIS) and I have reintroduced the State Defense Forces Improvement Act. This legislation will recognize the importance of the State Defense Forces, authorize DOD and DHS to coordinate Homeland Security efforts with and provide training to State Defense Forces and allow State Defense Forces to receive surplus DOD equipment.

In conclusion, God bless our troops, and we will never forget September 11.

□ 1030

CIVILIAN CASUALTIES IN IRAQ

(Mr. KUCINICH asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. KUCINICH. Mr. Speaker, today's New York Times states that a London-based group of academics and researchers has released a report on civilian casualties in Iraq for the first 2 years of the war. The report, based on analysis of civilian casualties reported in the news media, states that 24,865 civilians were killed and about 42,500 wounded.

The report goes on to list its findings specifically. We also know that there is another study which was published in October of 2004 in the Lancet, the British medical journal, according to the New York Times, that says that some of the estimates of Iraqi civilian deaths range as high as 100,000.

I have stood on this floor many times and bemoaned the loss of our American troops, but I think in the name of humanity we have to start thinking